

STERIC STABILIZATION OF LIPOSOMES BY COPOLYMERS WITH DIFFERENT COMPOSITION

Elena Drakalska^{*a}, Denitsa Momekova^a, Stergios Pispas^b, Nikolay Lambov^a, Stanislav Rangelov^c

^aFaculty of Pharmacy, Medical University –Sofia, 2 Dunav Str., 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria, ^bTheoretical and Physical Chemistry Institute, National Hellenic Research Foundation 48 Vass. Constantinou Ave. 11635 Athens, Greece,

^cInstitut of polymers, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

*corresponding author: edrakalska@yahoo.com

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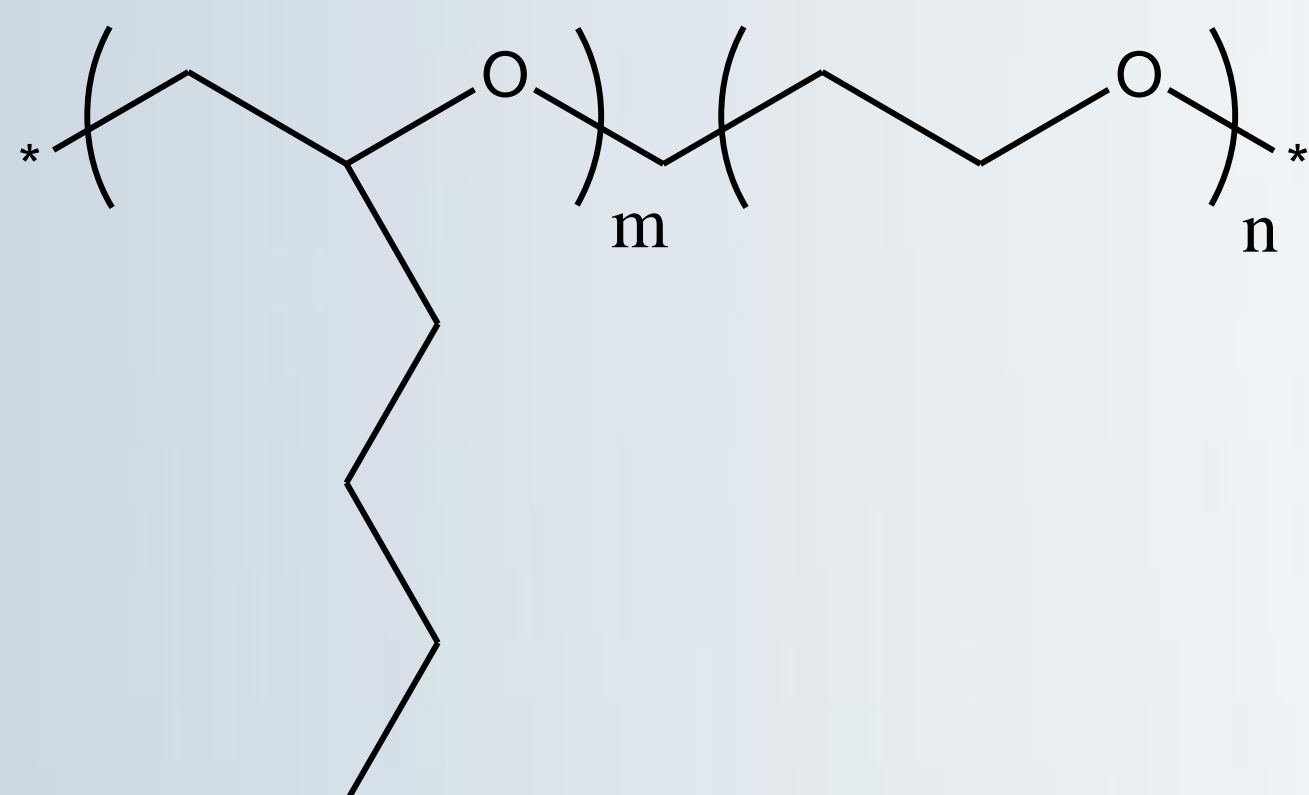
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INTRODUCTION: Liposomes have been considered as almost universal carriers for drugs and diagnostic agents, as they being biodegradable non toxic and are able to accommodate both hydrophilic and hydrophobic agents. A major hurdle towards in vivo utilization of liposomes is their prompt by the cells of the RES. Typically, prolonged circulation of the liposomes is achieved using poly(ethylene glycol) (PEG) covalently connected to a lipid residue which is incorporated into the liposome bilayer. The polymer chains create a repulsive barrier around liposomes, which reduces the interactions with blood components and consequently increases the blood circulation time. At a certain critical content referred to as saturation limit, which depends on lipid composition and PEG-molecular weight, the PEG-lipids induce a transition from bilayers to a micellar phase.

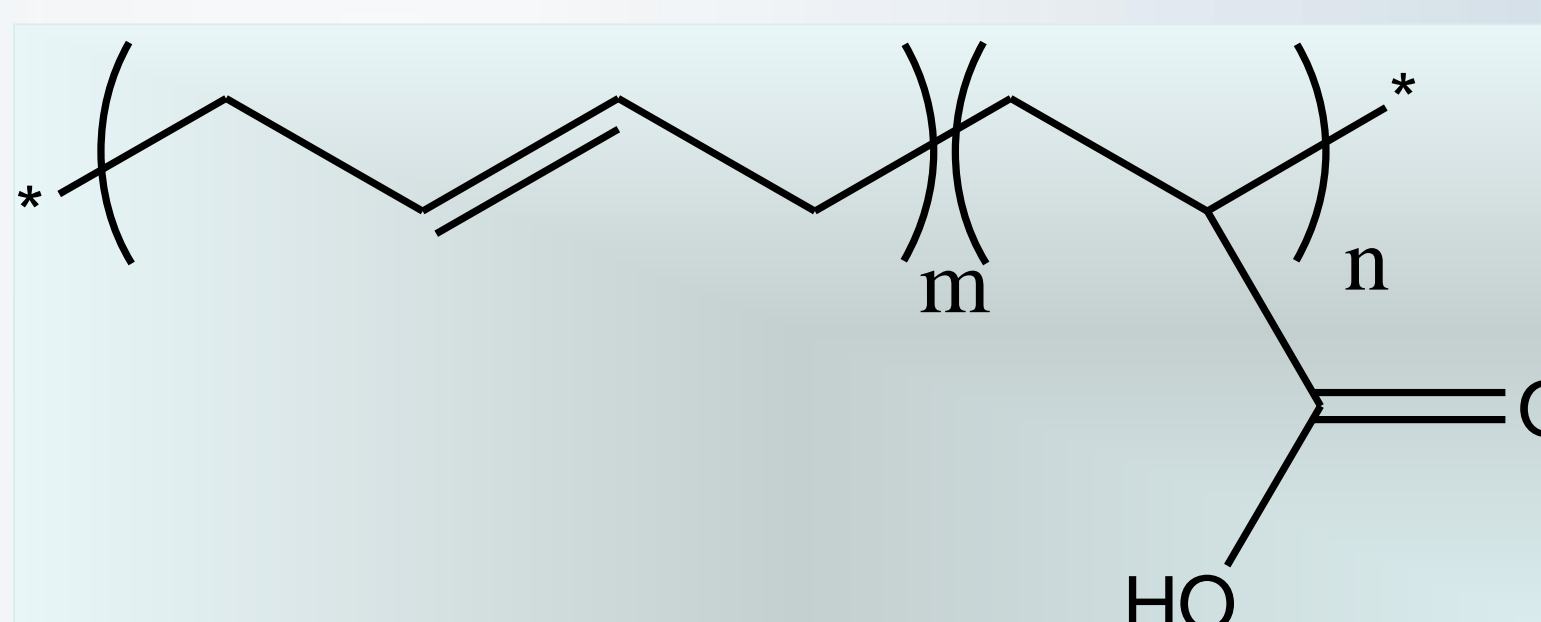
AIM: In this study we investigate the effects of the novel copolymers on the morphological properties and membrane integrity of lipid bilayers based on dipalmitoylphosphatidylcholine:cholesterol and pH-sensitive liposomes based on dioleoylphosphatidyl ethanol amine:cholesterol hemisuccinate liposomes. The copolymers were selected to differ in the structure and number of a hydrophobic anchors and the type and length of the hydrophilic chains. The chemical structures, composition and nominal molecular weight of the copolymers are given in Figure 1. To meet this objective we used dynamic light scattering, cryo-transmission electron microscopy and fluorescence spectroscopy.

Polyhexenyl-polyoxyethylene oxide



EOHO₂₀₆ Mw = 14 000; PEO content(%) – 83
EOHO₂₀₈ Mw = 7 800; PEO content (%) – 64

Polyisoprene-polyacrylic acid



PI-PAA
Mw = 12 000; PI content (%) - 36

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: The utilized method for preparation of liposomes is known to yield uniform, unilamellar vesicles with mean diameter of about 140 nm. The apparent particle diameters were found slightly depend on polymer/phospholipid and the copolymer composition. Within the all copolymer to phospholipid ratios studied, the size distributions were monomodal with a low polydispersity index (below 0.2) (see Fig. 2).

The liposome morphology was investigated by cryo-TEM. Within the series of liposomes stabilized with non-ionic EOHO₂₀₈ and EOHO₂₀₆ polymers in all micrographs the predominant objects were intact, well separated and unilamellar liposomes. The first signs for liposomal destabilization (liposomal openings, bilayer fragments or disks) were observed at copolymer concentrations as high as 7.5 mol %. The fraction of disks observed at 7.5 mol % was higher for the copolymer EOHO₂₀₈. Within the series of liposomes stabilized with pH-sensitive polymer PI-PAA the predominant objects in all images were liposomes but a micellar fraction co-exist with well separated and intact liposomes at copolymer concentration 5 mol % (Fig. 3).

A leakage assay using calcein was carried out in order to evaluate the membrane permeability of non pH-sensitive DPPC:CHOL and pH-sensitive DOPE:CHEMs liposomes stabilized with increasing amounts (2.5 – 7.5 mol%) of copolymer PI-PAA as a function of pH. The results obtained show that PI-PAA can induce pH-dependent calcein release from DPPC liposomes at low pH 4.5 and at the same time the tested polymer did not compromise the pH-sensitivity of DOPE liposomes (Fig. 4).

CONCLUSIONS: This study shows that the utilized block copolymers can be considered as promising sterically stabilizing agents for the development of long circulating liposomes. An important advantage of the copolymer PI-PAA is that incorporation in the DOPE:CHEMs membrane does not deteriorate the pH-sensitivity of the formulation and even more the acid triggered calcein leakage was optimized. In addition, this polymer can induce pH-dependent release from non pH-sensitive DPPC liposomes which make this polymer promising candidate for preparation of second generation pH-sensitive liposomes.

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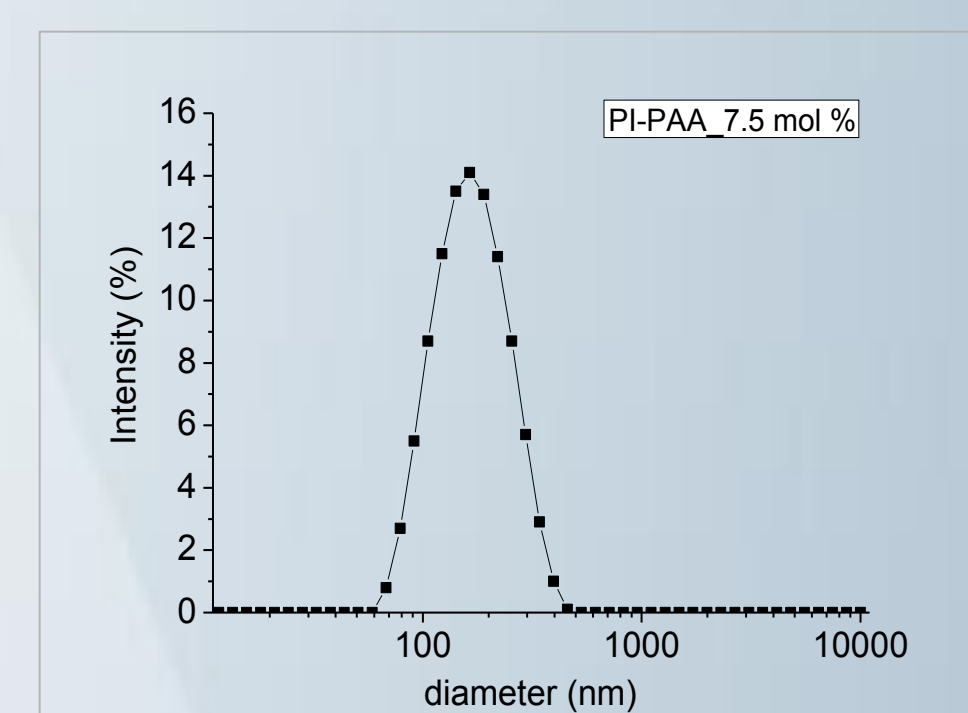
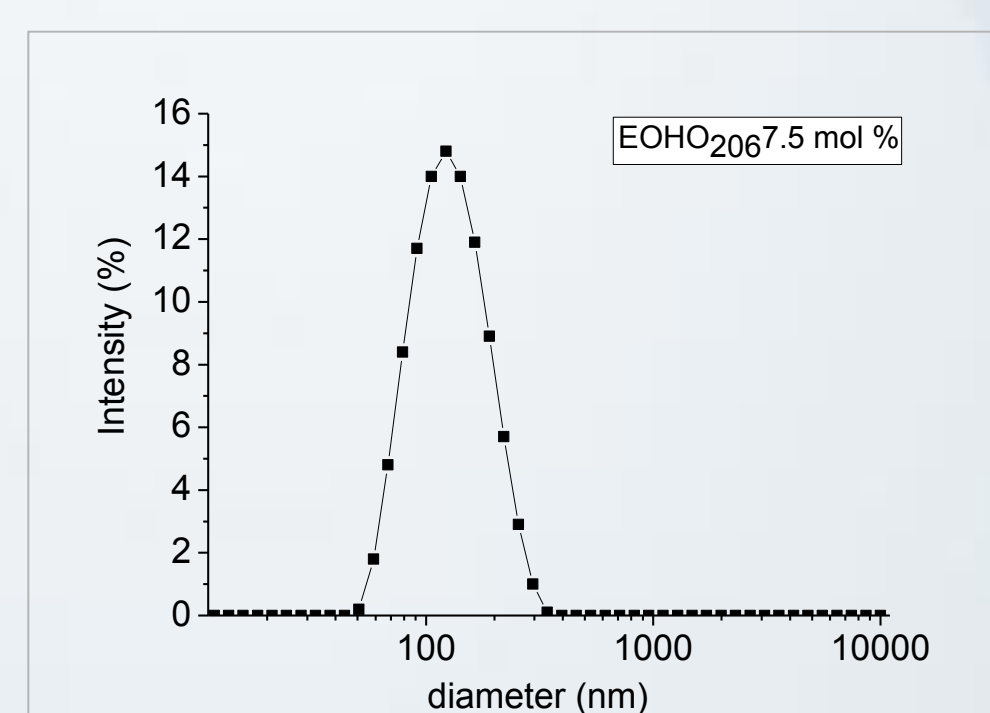


Figure 2. Size distribution of liposomes stabilized with 7.5 mol % of copolymers EOHO₂₀₈ (left) and PI-PAA (right)

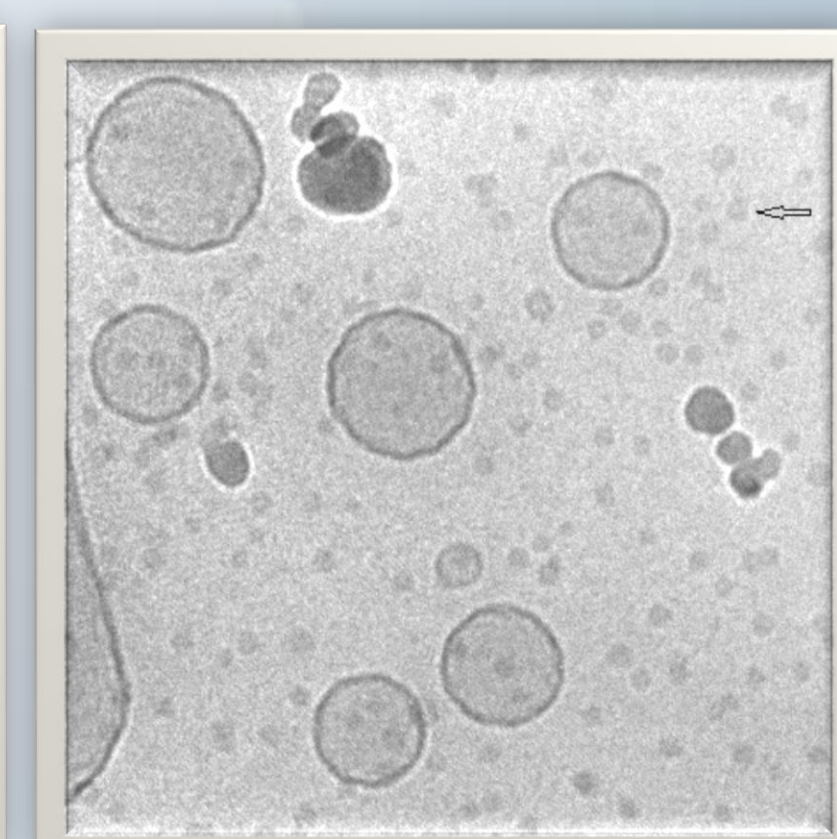
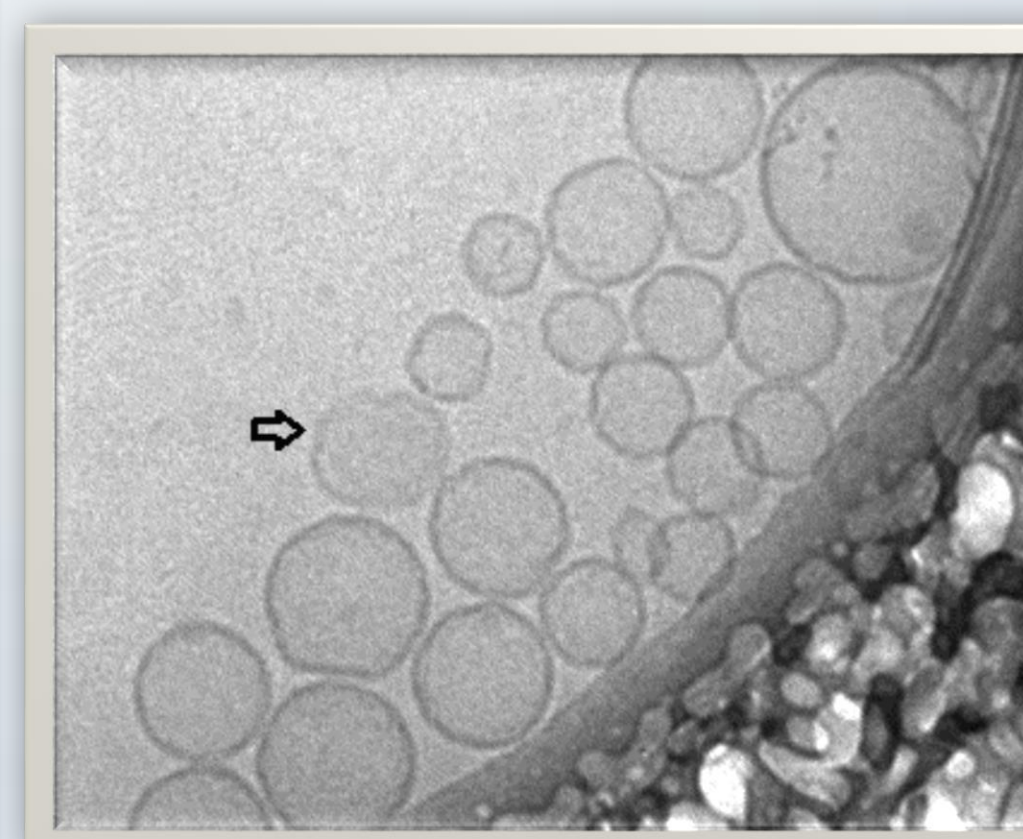


Figure 3. Cryo-TEM images of DPPC:Chol liposomes stabilized with 7.5 mol % EOHO₂₀₆ (left) and 7.5 mol % PI-PAA (right). The arrow shows liposomal opening (left) and micelles (right).

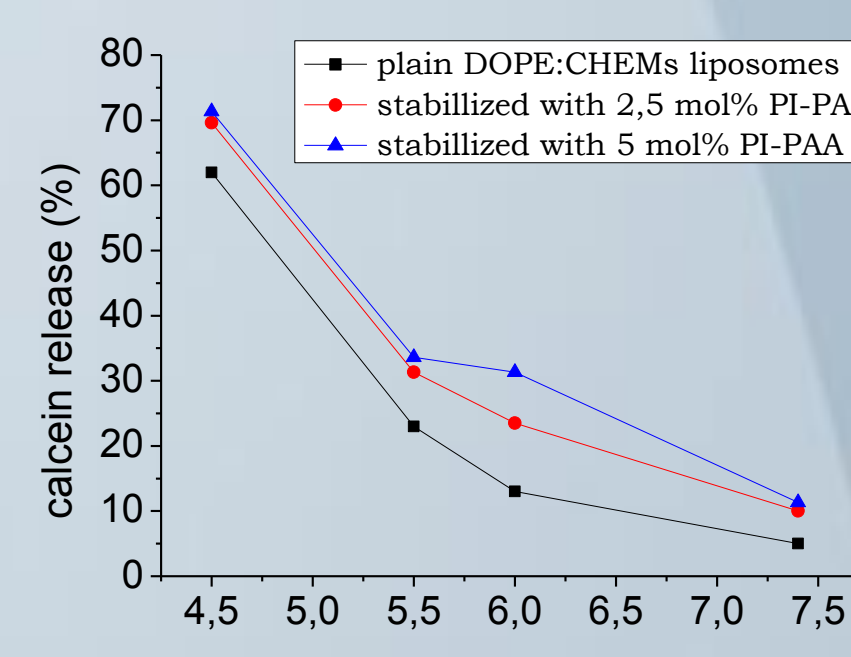
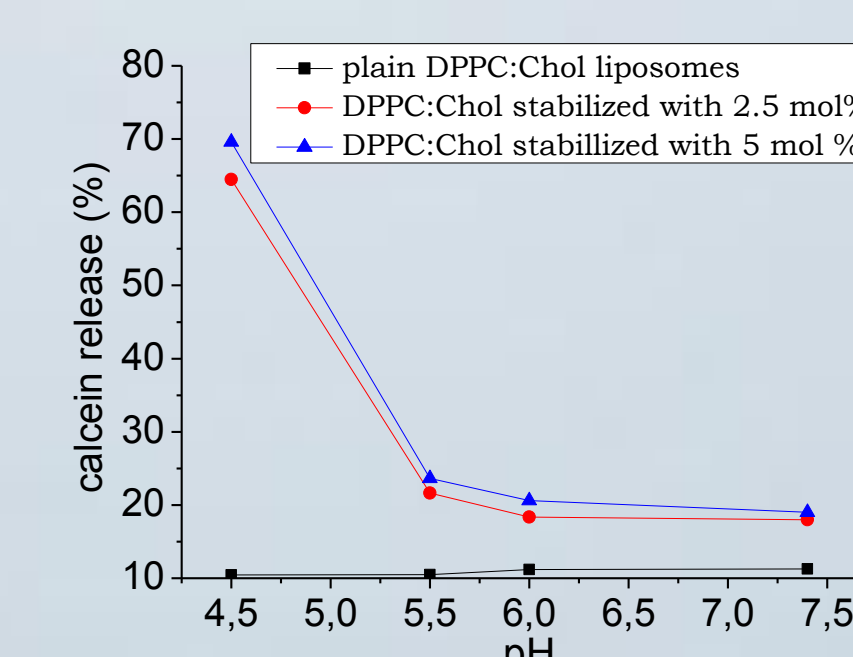


Figure 4. Spontaneous pH-dependent leakage at 37°C of calcein from DPPC:CHOL (left) and DOPE:CHEMs (right) liposomes. Plain (squares) or stabilized with 2.5 (circles) or 5 mol% (triangles) PI-PAA.